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The Anatomy of a Rumor... Even Denials Feed Its Spread

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SANTA MONICA, Calif. —Philip (Flip) Webster, a student at Towson (Md.) State College, learned about it from a flyer that was being passed out around the Johns Hopkins University campus.

Rands Lynn Byrne, a junior at Michigan State University, heard about it from Clyde Morris, her communications professor, who had heard about it from a friend who had a clipping from a paper in Portland, Ore.

Harvard chemistry Professor George Kistiakowski, who was science adviser to President Eisenhower, heard about it from some people who had picked up the rumor in North Carolina.

Peter Burchyns, a graduate student, heard two students at Stanford University talking about it after seeing it in the Wall Street Journal.

Kathryn Bennett heard it at a neighborhood meeting in Minneapolis from someone who had read it in the Village Voice.

What each heard, along with thousands—perhaps millions—of others across the country, was the rumor that the Nixon administration had hired the Rand Corp., a super "think tank" in Santa Monica, to study the possibilities of canceling the American election in 1972.

Rand, which does 80 percent of its work for the defense department, has categorically denied the report. But the rumor continues to circulate. It got to the point that last weekend, White House counselor Daniel P. Moynihan felt obliged to dwell on it at length in his commencement address. He called the persistence of the rumor symptomatic of the "fact that mistrust of government had reached epidemic proportions."

Rand has received widely read among the left. Despite this, the rumor hundreds of letters and The Voice ran it on April 16, queries continue to pour in from all over the country—as its source.

The Wall St. Journal butties. sors, students and housewives. It has sought to quash the reports in every instance, but, in the words of Jack Vogel, communications director, "I don't think we've seen the end of this fluke, ran only in the West—we printed it." He added thing yet. It's just gone national.

The first version came hard to spike—that the stuff Rand Corp. "think tank" is again he would not have studying the idea of canceling the 1972 presidential elections if radicals threaten to disrupt it.

By now, the rumor was shake anybody out of the hot and spreading. The trees the way it did," he 100,000 circulation under said.

Howard said that a New ground sheet, the Los Angeles Free Press, ran it with house reporter had picked front page headlines: syndicated columnist Irv Kupel- but he would not say how or net used it in his Chicago where.

Sun-Times column; The Nation magazine included it in it out," Howard added, "but an editorial entitled, "In the real problem is the way frastructure of Repression." It was interpreted and Interestingly, most of the twisted around by others."

National press—including Rand president Rowen Time, Newsweek, the New York Times and The Washington Post—and television of "a heightened sense of stayed away from the rumor, at least until Moynihan openly discussed it in his address at Fordham University.

Moreover, many of the outlets who printed the report also carried the denial of Rand president Henry S. Rowen, that the institution "has not undertaken such a study; it does not contemplate making such a study; nor has it been approached by anyone with a proposal for such a study."

Rowan repeated this to a reporter, adding that Rand had searched its files back three years for something that might be construed or misconstrued as the rumored study. "There was nothing," he insisted, "Dis- sidence, elections or violence in America is not a subject we are working on."

By now, however, the story had been picked up by the Village Voice, a New York City weekly newspaper, and the rumor was spreading again.

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